

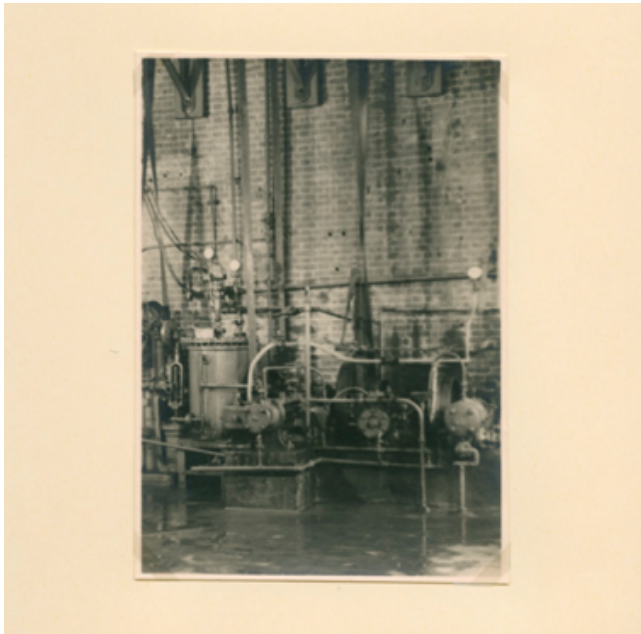
**«HOLLAND WAS THE WORLD'S BIGGEST COKE MANUFACTURER»
{i.e. Transnational Usury-addicted Mafias
Operating in Holland AND Around the World
Were the World's Biggest Coke Manufacturers}**

October 28, 2009

by Alex

{from Vice's neoliberal, usury-addicted editorial staff}

**{NOTES IN CURLY BRACKETS by Rafael Andrés Escribano—
www.facebook.com/rafael.a.escribano}**



{VICE'S EDITORIAL FRAME-UP:} Yes, here is yet another story about cocaine on Viceland. But it's also about history! And about a book as well! Literature, in fact! Conny Braam, a really cool lady who was chairman of the Dutch branch of the anti-Apartheid movement for 25 years, wrote a book about the Dutch cocaine factory, which was cranking out marching powder (literally) between 1900 and 1963. It also turns out the Dutch government made tons of money during World War 1 by supplying the surrounding countries with drugs. By doing that they were partly responsible for making the war last longer. Read the interview to learn all about this nasty little history.



[photo: Portrait by Cornelia Tollens]

VICE: How did you discover the topic of your novel, «The Travelling Merchant of the Dutch Cocaine Factory»?

CONNY BRAAM: When I was working on a trilogy about my family, the Abraham trilogy {i.e. Abraham → Braam}, I found out Holland made a fortune selling opium in Indonesia. This was at the end of the 19th century. There was a state-run opium factory on Java. When I was doing research on that factory, I found out there was a cocaine factory in Holland. It was located in Amsterdam, at the Weespertrekvaart. There's a Hell's Angels chapter located there these days. [image: "The new factory that was built in 1909"]



VICE: I read about the factory in your book. It was new for me that Holland produced cocaine at some point.

CONNY BRAAM: It was a fascinating discovery for me as well, because my research quickly showed that that factory was the biggest cocaine factory in the world. But what puzzled me most was that the sales figures had risen enormously during World War I. That was odd, because the medical usage of cocaine was limited in those days. Dentists and eye doctors used it for anesthetics, but that's about it. And by then everybody knew that the stuff was dangerous. So why the bigger production? But then I found out research had been done in Germany to test the effects of coke on soldiers. The reports written about those tests were jubilant.

VICE: So cocaine was systematically tested on soldiers?

CONNY BRAAM: Yeah, by Theodor Aschenbrandt, a German scientist. In his 1883 report «Die psychologischepsychologische Wirkung und Bedeutung des Cocain» he described how cocaine increased German soldiers' stamina, and how it decreased their hunger and fear and that the stuff made them get worked up much easier. In short: it made them better soldiers {for international usury and awful soldiers of God and of their own folk}.



VICE: Right.

CONNY BRAAM: After that, I found clear evidence of the Dutch Cocaine Factory selling cocaine to all parties during the war in a pharmaceutical weekly. Everybody from the British, the Germans, the French to the Canadians. There were many countries involved in that war and millions of soldiers from all over were fighting in the trenches. Neutral Netherlands supplied coke to all of those countries. This a bizarre fact and a dirty piece of Dutch history that was more or less covered up. It's not as if they teach this in school.

VICE: Nope.

CONNY BRAAM: The Netherlands made unbelievable amounts of money of trading during

the war. They emerged from World War I as the richest country, together with the United States. But it's been kept out of the history books. That's why I went after this specific story. However, assuming Holland got rich by selling cocaine to countries at war with each other and writing a novel based on that assumption is easy. As a novelist, you don't have to prove anything. But I didn't want to do that. I found this particular story too important, and the accusation too grave to left unresearched. This meant I had to dig through archives for two years straight.

CONNY BRAAM: How did that quest go? Was it full-time?

VICE: Yes, day and night. I got a little obsessed. However, this is my tenth book, and most of my books were based on research, so I developed my methods of inquiry. That's how I knew how and where to look. [image: "Cocaine processing kettle"]



VICE: So where did you look?

CONNY BRAAM: Well, I knew there wouldn't be any paper evidence left at the site of the former factory. The Hell's Angels are there now. But I did know I'd have more luck at the receiving side of correspondence, like the Ministry of Health. So I went there, and guess what,

I found correspondence between the Dutch Cocaine Factory and the different state departments. The most important letter I found there was about granting trade permits. You see, the Great War broke out on August 1 1914, and Holland immediately issued a ban on exports.

VICE: Why was that?

CONNY BRAAM: Because they had to look at what would happen. They couldn't go on supplying the Germans with goods if they didn't know how the British would react. But after no more than a couple of weeks, trading recommenced. One of the first factories that asked to be excepted from the trading ban was the Dutch Cocaine Factory. And their request was granted. So halfway through August, they began supplying cocaine to different parties.

VICE: That's fast. What did you find out after that?

CONNY BRAAM: When I understood I had to be at the receiving end of correspondence from the factory, I went on looking in the archives of foreign pharmaceutical companies. I found a lot of material there. In the UK, it was at Burroughs Welcome {i.e. Borroughs Wellcome}, a pharmaceutical company. One of the characters in my book is a buyer employed by that company. I spent a lot of time going through their archives, because they had a wealth of material. Burroughs Welcome {i.e. Borroughs Wellcome} was the first company in the world that made pills out of cocaine. Before B. W. {Borroughs Wellcome} came along, medicine was imbibed by means of oils or powders, so it meant a revolution in pharmacology.

VICE: I read in your book that those pills were called Forced March. What's in a name?

CONNY BRAAM: Yeah. Coke forces you to march. But you know, this stuff was sold everywhere at the beginning of the 20th century. Harrod's sold it, for instant. And at that time there were shameless adverts in England for cocaine, in which it was sold as being a useful

gift for friends with which they could increase their performance.



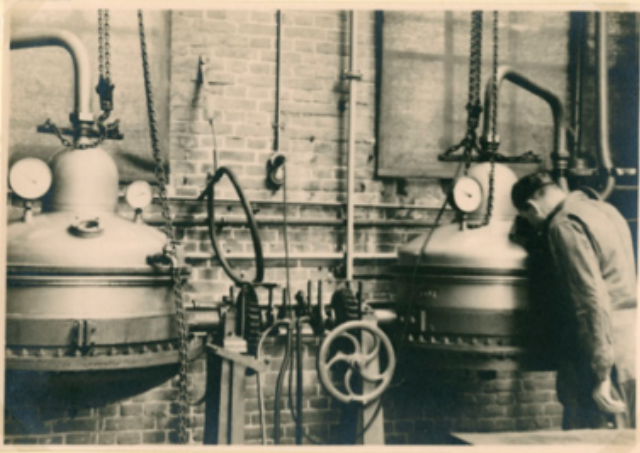
VICE: Like the way they advertise energy drinks nowadays.

CONNY BRAAM: Yes. Although Forced March packed more punch: it contained both caffeine and cocaine. And that combination really gets you going. I checked it with pharmacologists, and they told me this stuff made you crazy. These pills were really heavy. And millions were made. Which was handy for usage, because taking cocaine in powder form isn't very practical in the trenches.

VICE: Why not?

CONNY BRAAM: The conditions in the trenches were terrible. And a gram, which is a lot, is

quite precious. And perhaps a lot of soldiers wouldn't take the stuff voluntarily. So I suspect that in a lot of cases it was mixed with rum. [image: "Boiling vats in the factory, used to extract coca paste from coca leaves."]



VICE: Oh?

CONNY BRAAM: Yeah, a lot of soldiers were given a mug of rum before they went over the top and out of the trenches. And sometimes it would be rum with coke.

VICE: That's funny.

CONNY BRAAM: Mixing alcohol with cocaine doubles the effects of the stuff.

VICE: But that's not something that's reflected in the movies or in general knowledge about the Great War. I think of cold soldiers who are out of tobacco, not of drugged privates.

CONNY BRAAM: It was stated in the treatment of Versailles that cocaine could only be used for scientific means. It's interesting to know that hundreds of thousands heavily addicted soldiers were walking around through Europe after the war. I found articles about that in The

Times. One article reported about hundreds of addicted veterans roaming the British streets to rob pharmacists.

VICE: Jesus. Was cocaine still sold in shops at that time?

CONNY BRAAM: Yes, but it was harder to buy, because of the treaty. Even so, the English Department of War was well aware of the addicting effects of cocaine and of the increase in domestic violence because of coke use. Scientists wrote about it as well. But in Germany, the problems were even bigger. In one hospital in Berlin, tens of thousands heavily cocaine addicted soldiers were registered as patients. Austria and Czechoslovakia had problems with addicts as well. But those were difficult times anyway. Europe lay in ruins.

VICE: And then there was this flu.

CONNY BRAAM: Not only that, the emperors and monarchies fell as well, and the Russian Revolution was in full force. In Germany, there was the impending threat of revolution as well. I found texts out of that time, of anti-communist writers and scientists. They blamed Western Europe's troubles on cocaine.

VICE: Hmm.

CONNY BRAAM: But you don't stop the problems with coke immediately after a war stops, of course. So when it did stop, a huge black market emerged.

VICE: Until when was the factory operational?

CONNY BRAAM: It was acquired by AKZO Nobel in 1963. But we're skipping ahead. Recently I found out, when the book was finished already, that the production numbers of the factory dropped in 1925, but shot up again in 1942. And that's the time when they were

making amphetamines, speed. This was a drug that Hitler gave to his soldiers to make them work better. Holland was occupied by Germany in those years. So the Americans and British probably weren't supplied by the factory back then. So you can state that the Dutch Cocaine Factory supplied amphetamines to the Germans in WW2 with a clear conscience. Or, you know...

VICE: Yeah, a real clear conscience.

CONNY BRAAM: After WW2, the production didn't stop. I was approached by a man who knew I was working on this book a while ago, and he told me he worked in the factory in the 50s. He was a great guy, he even brought me a distiller and other tools that were used in the factory. He was chemical analyst there. He used to test the purity of heroin, cocaine and opium. A lot of that was still made there back then.

VICE: What did he tell you about that period?

CONNY BRAAM: He hated the fact that he had worked in that kind of factory, even though it was for a couple of years only.

VICE: But he didn't see it as something bad back then.

CONNY BRAAM: No, but he did start thinking about it more in the last years. The idea that he helped produce a substance that destroyed people's lives was killing him. Nevertheless, he helped me estimate the volumes of substance produced in the factory, and guess by how much production increased during the Great War? That lead me to the robust belief that it was used to supply armies with coke. What other use could it have?

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VICE: There weren't any marketing boys back then.

CONNY BRAAM: Ha ha, and no Wall Street boys either. There were artistic scenes where coke was snorted back then though. That was mostly in the 20s. After that, a small recreational user base came into being. But you shouldn't forget the cocaine factory had created a pretty big market. There were so many soldiers who knew the effects of cocaine. And if you think of Germany then, with its poverty and hunger... If you know what cocaine does to you and you're in a situation like that, wouldn't you look for it? So that craving created an enormous problem.

VICE: And Holland made money off that problem.

CONNY BRAAM: By taxing it, we made good money. It's funny to see that earlier attempts to forbid the use of cocaine were sabotaged by the Dutch government. Several countries tried to get together to restrict the use of cocaine, so you could only get it on doctor's prescription.

[image: "Lab assistant carefully weighing cocaine in a closed cabin."



VICE: In the same way the sale of morphine is regulated right now?

CONNY BRAAM: Yes, it's comparable to that. But they [the Dutch government] didn't care, because a lot of money was to be made. Likewise with opium. So Holland has quite a history as a drug producing nation. And it's linked to this terrible war. By the way, World War I is probably the first war in which drugs were used as a weapon. And there was the second world war where amphetamines were used, Vietnam with its heroin and to this day cocaine is being used. And if you look at Afghanistan, Iraq, and Africa, you see that war is unthinkable without these stimulating drugs.

VICE: That's not something you see in the mainstream news very often.

CONNY BRAAM: Because there's still a huge taboo on the subject. We tend to place soldiers returning from a war on a pedestal and look on them as heroes. You can't mess with their status. And you know how damaging drugs can be to someone's reputation.

VICE: Like any famous athlete who got caught doping?

CONNY BRAAM: Exactly. Their careers are gone and all their achievements are tainted. The same goes for soldiers. When they return from a war, the only thing those boys have left is their status as heroes. You can't take that away from them... I spoke to a couple of UN soldiers though, and they straight up told me about using drugs.

VICE: In Bosnia?

CONNY BRAAM: No, in Rwanda. During dinner, there was an ex-soldier sitting next to me, and he lost it when I told him about the book I was working on.

VICE: Then he told you about his experience.

CONNY BRAAM: Yes, he told me he used pills there called Blue Heaven.

VICE: Which was?

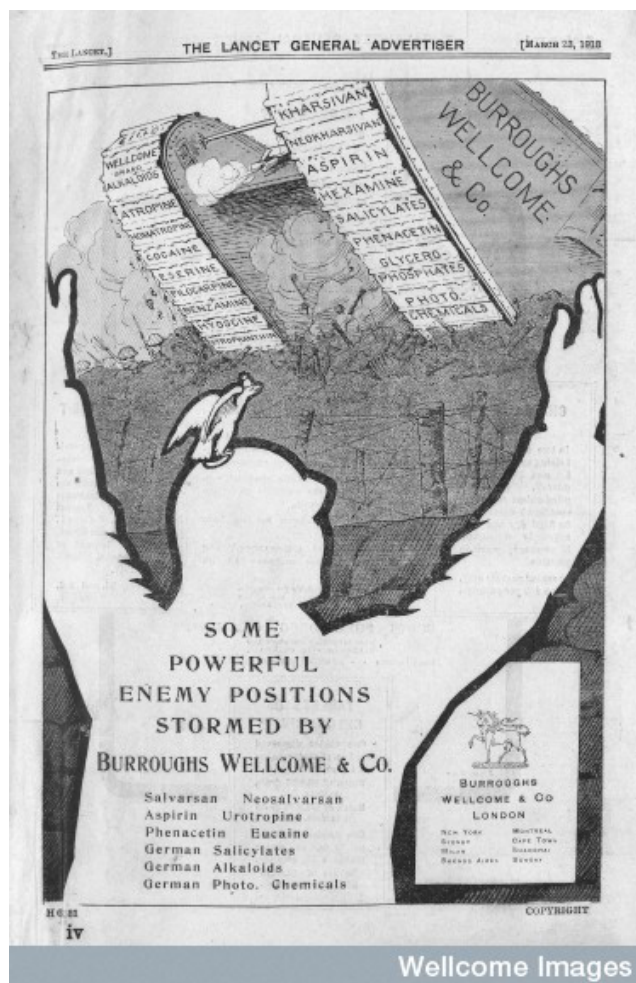
CONNY BRAAM: Cocaine in pill form.

VICE: Before our conversation I'd never heard about coke pills.

CONNY BRAAM: Well, the stuff is used in many different ways. People inject it and snort it as well. Sherlock Holmes injected it. "The needle, Watson!" he called out when he was dealing with a tough problem. Watson would protest, but it was supposed to be good for the brain. Freud used coke as well. He wrote «Uber Coka», a very positive book about cocaine. But he warned about it later on.

VICE: Your book is about this fictive character Lucien, the traveling merchant of the Dutch Cocaine Factory. In his desire to buy a Harley Davidson, he sold large quantities of coke to both sides of the struggling factions, making himself and the factory he works for partly responsible for making the war last longer. Why did you decide to tell the story of the Factory and the role the Dutch played in World War I in this way?

CONNY BRAAM: That decision was formed on basis of the facts I found and the emotions it stirred in me. I could've written a non-fiction book. But this form just worked better.



VICE: Why?

CONNY BRAAM: In my experience, gained by writing other books, by writing a novel you reach a far larger audience and you give better insight into the facts. One of the main

characters is a friendly British soldier, whose life is completely destroyed when he gets in touch with cocaine. And on the other hand, I wanted to paint a picture of a normal, ordinary factory with an ordinary young lad as its salesman. A nice guy from Haarlem, who just wants to buy a Harley Davidson. Only in a later stage, when he meets soldiers, he understand what misery he wrought with his product. And by putting the history to paper in this way, it reads like a thriller...

VICE: Which is a better way to relay the message you're telling.

CONNY BRAAM: Exactly. The book will probably cause some reactions in the UK as well. The Great War is much more on people's minds there than in Holland. So there'll probably be some debates. Also because it happened with knowledge of the British government. And people will wonder what's happening with soldiers right now, like with the troops who are fighting abroad.

VICE: Where did the Netherlands get the resources to create their cocaine?

CONNY BRAAM: The coca leaves, from which the coke was extracted, came from coca bushes from Bolivia and Peru. But because it was such a popular product in the 19th century, one of those bushes was brought to Java, to the botanical garden. Then they started experimenting with it, and apparently, the coca bush did really well on Java. After that, they laid down plantations. That's how the famous Java cocaine came to be. It was of far better quality than the South American variant. The Bolivian and Peruvian markets were utterly destroyed. There was a coca leave auction in Amsterdam at that time.

VICE: And where was that?

CONNY BRAAM: In Amsterdam. I don't know the precise location. During WWII other countries were denied access there, so they could gain a monopoly on the cocaine trade.

VICE: Clever. But why does most coke come from South America right now and not from the east?

CONNY BRAAM: I don't know. There's a lot of things we don't know. Maybe there are huge plantations there. Indonesia's a big country.

VICE: How do you think Holland is dealing with this specific history?

CONNY BRAAM: I think it's been buried. If you think about how long it took me to gather this information, that's not right. But you know, Holland has other skeletons in its closet...

VICE: For instance?

CONNY BRAAM: Take Apartheid. It's a Dutch word. Verwoerd, the inventor of the Apartheid system, was from Amsterdam. The Netherlands left its traces that way...

VICE: But the Dutch government clearly distanced itself from Apartheid.

CONNY BRAAM: But Dutch corporations {i.e. not exactly “Dutch” but rather usury-addicted transnational corporations} helped keep the system in place. Shell and Unilever had economical interest in Apartheid. The system fell apart when we attacked those corporations. Touch them in their wallets, and your actions finally start having effect. But there's this silly Dutch mentality that I like to undermine {Braam doesn't want to undermine international usury-addicted transnational mafias but rather Holland and the Dutch folk}. This arrogance about our history. If you don't dare to look at your history honestly... {Neither do you, Connie Braam.} We {“we”, meaning “blame the Dutch not the usurious transnationals operating under color of “Dutchness”} played our part in slavery, and apartheid, and now this. Considered that way, I truly am on a mission, ha ha! I'll get them! Thanks to the International Institute of

Social History, Amsterdam {<http://socialhistory.org/en>} for the pictures of the cocaine factory.